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Bret HARTE

CONCEPCION DE ARGUELLO

(1926)

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THE ROMANCE OF HISPANIC CALIFORNIA

CONCEPCION DE ARGUELLO

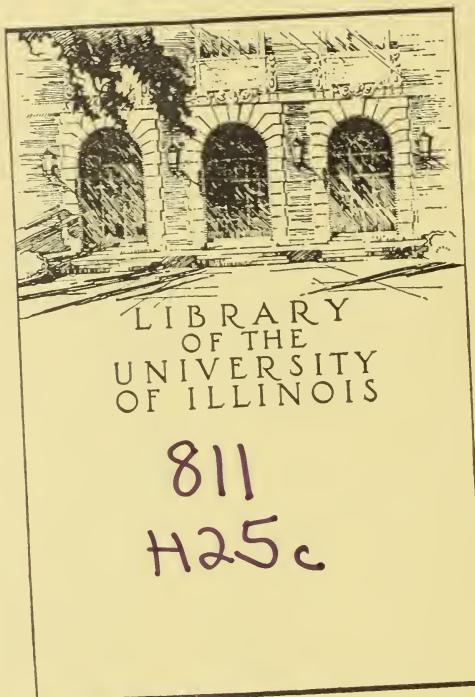
(PRESIDIO DE SAN FRANCISCO, 1806)

BY BRETT HARTE

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WITH TYPOGRAPHICAL SPECIMEN PAGES OF
THE REPORT OF COUNT REZANOV OF HIS
VOYAGE TO NUEVA CALIFORNIA IN 1806





ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

CONCEPCION DE ARGUELLO
(PRESIDIO DE SAN FRANCISCO, 1806)

BY BRET HARTE

DOÑA CONCEPCIÓN WAS DISTINGUISHED FOR HER VIVACITY AND CHEERFULNESS, HER LOVE-INSPIRING AND BRILLIANT EYES, EXCEEDINGLY BEAUTIFUL TEETH, EXPRESSIVE AND PLEASING FEATURES, SHAPELINESS OF FIGURE, AND FOR A THOUSAND OTHER CHARMS, BESIDES AN ARTLESS NATURAL DEMEANOR — BEAUTIES OF HER KIND ONE MAY FIND, THOUGH SELDOM, ONLY IN ITALY, PORTUGAL, AND SPAIN

LANGSDORFF: VOYAGES AND TRAVELS

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
THE PRIVATE PRESS OF THOMAS C. RUSSELL
SEVENTEEN THIRTY-FOUR NINETEENTH AVENUE

1926

WOULD REZANOV HAVE WED HER?

WHAT THE HISTORIANS HAVE TO SAY

DOCTOR JOSIAH ROYCE: CALIFORNIA (AMERICAN COMMONWEALTHS)

In 1806 the first Russian ship came to the port of San Francisco, from Sitka, under the direction of Rezánov, an official of high position, who had gone to Sitka as inspector of the establishments there. His purpose at the moment was to purchase supplies for the now nearly starving colony at Sitka. Although such transactions with foreigners were forbidden to the Californians, still, after long and vain negotiations with Governor Arrillaga, and with the commandant of the presidio, Argüello, Rezánov at last gained his commercial purpose by dint of making successful love to the beautiful daughter of Argüello, the Doña Concepción of the well-known and highly romantic tale that has since grown up out of this incident. Rezánov was actually betrothed, in the end, to the fair young daughter; and when he set out, with his purchases made, it was under the solemn promise to return and marry his new beloved as soon as possible. He died, however, while on his way across Siberia, during his return to St. Petersburg. The story, told in several versions, and immortalized in Mr. Bret Harte's best poem, has won many tears. Rezánov himself describes the affair, in his reports, as a purely business-like stroke of diplomacy, whereby he gained the decisive official help of the Argüello family. Whether he was sincere in his love or not, Doña Concepción was in hers. She died, as nun, at Benicia, in 1857.

DOCTOR CHARLES E. CHAPMAN: HISTORY OF CALIFORNIA — SPANISH PERIOD

The whole affair of the courtship of Rezánov and Concepción Argüello occupied little more than six weeks, but the real beauty of the tale is in the aftermath, as is so alluringly set forth in the famous poem of Bret Harte. . . . On March 1, 1807, at Krasnoyarsk, he died. Rezánov's constancy, therefore, was never tested. There is no evidence as to how he felt toward Concepción after he left Alta California.

IRVING BERDINE RICHMAN: CALIFORNIA UNDER SPAIN AND MEXICO

Whether later he [Rezanov] would have performed with her his nuptial contract (with naught for Russia to be gained thereby) is open to question.

FR. ZEPHYRIN ENGELHARDT: SAN FRANCISCO, OR MISSION DOLORES

. . . a slip of a girl, who as the daughter of a mere lieutenant would hardly have been admitted into the proud circles of the richest court in Europe.

WHAT REZANOV HIMSELF HAS WRITTEN

* * * THE REPORT of NIKOLAI PETROVICH REZANOV to Count Nikolai Petrovich, the Russian minister of commerce, translated from the Russian, revised and corrected, is now in press and will be ready this autumn (1926). Therein Rezanov unbosoms himself to his friend the count and dispels every doubt. The report is a complete record of events from his leaving until his return to Sitka. The edition of the book is limited to some two hundred and sixty copies, each signed, numbered, and registered; type large and hand-set; octavo (10 x 6¹/₂"); heavy toned-white rag paper; printed at the Private Press of Thomas C. Russell, 1734 Nineteenth Avenue, San Francisco, California.

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H25e All that save

MARÍA DE LA CONCEPCIÓN MARCELA ARGÜELLO

LOVELIEST OF THE LOVELY SISTERS OF DON LUIS ARGÜELLO, THE DOÑA
CONCEPCIÓN IS THE UNIVERSALLY RECOGNIZED BEAUTY OF CALIFORNIA

REZANOV

C O N C E P C I O N D E A R G U E L L O
(P R E S I D I O D E S A N F R A N C I S C O , 1 8 0 6)

I

LOOKING seaward, o'er the sandhills stands the fortress, old and
quaint,
By the San Francisco friars lifted to their patron saint,—

Sponsor to that wondrous city, now apostate to the creed,
On whose youthful walls the Padre saw the angel's golden reed;

All its trophies long since scattered, all its blazon brushed away;
And the flag that flies above it but a triumph of to-day.

Never scar of siege or battle challenges the wandering eye,—
Never breach of warlike onset holds the curious passer-by;

Only one sweet human fancy interweaves its threads of gold
With the plain and homespun present, and a love that ne'er grows
old:

Only one thing holds its crumbling walls above the meaner dust,—
Listen to the simple story of a woman's love and trust.

II

Count von Resanoff, the Russian, envoy of the mighty Czar,
Stood beside the deep embrasures where the brazen cannon are;

He with grave provincial magnates long had held serene debate
On the Treaty of Alliance and the high affairs of state;

He from grave provincial magnates oft had turned to talk apart
With the Comandante's daughter on the questions of the heart,

Until points of gravest import yielded slowly one by one,
And by Love was consummated what Diplomacy begun;

Till beside the deep embrasures, where the brazen cannon are,
He received the twofold contract for approval of the Czar;

Till beside the brazen cannon the betrothèd bade adieu,
And, from sallyport and gateway, north the Russian eagles flew.

III

Long beside the deep embrasures, where the brazen cannon are,
Did they wait the promised bridegroom and the answer of the Czar;

Day by day on wall and bastion beat the hollow, empty breeze,–
Day by day the sunlight glittered on the vacant, smiling seas;

Week by week the near hills whitened in their dusty leather cloaks,–
Week by week the far hills darkened from the fringing plain of oaks;

Till the rains came, and far-breaking, on the fierce southwester tost,
Dashed the whole long coast with color, and then vanished and
were lost.

So each year the seasons shifted,– wet and warm and drear and dry;
Half a year of clouds and flowers, – half a year of dust and sky.

Still it brought no ship nor message,– brought no tidings, ill or meet,
For the statesmanlike Commander, for the daughter fair and sweet.

Yet she heard the varying message, voiceless to all ears beside:
"He will come," the flowers whispered; "Come no more," the dry
hills sighed.

Still she found him with the waters lifted by the morning breeze, -
Still she lost him with the folding of the great white-tented seas;

Until hollows chased the dimples from her cheeks of olive brown,
And at times a swift, shy moisture dragged the long sweet lashes
down;

Or the small mouth curved and quivered as for some denied caress,
And the fair young brow was knitted in an infantine distress.

Then the grim Commander, pacing where the brazen cannon are,
Comforted the maid with proverbs, - wisdom gathered from afar;

Bits of ancient observation by his fathers garnered, each
As a pebble worn and polished in the current of his speech:

"'Those who wait the coming rider travel twice as far as he';
'Tired wench and coming butter never did in time agree';

"'He that getteth himself honey, though a clown, he shall have flies';
'In the end God grindeth the miller'; 'In the dark the mole has eyes';

"'He whose father is Alcalde of his trial hath no fear,' -
And be sure the Count has reasons that will make his conduct clear."

Then the voice sententious faltered, and the wisdom it would teach
Lost itself in fondest trifles of his soft Castilian speech;

And on "Concha," "Conchitita," and "Conchita" he would dwell
With the fond reiteration which the Spaniard knows so well.

So with proverbs and caresses, half in faith and half in doubt,
Every day some hope was kindled, flickered, faded, and went out.

IV

Yearly, down the hillside sweeping, came the stately cavalcade,
Bringing revel to vaquero, joy and comfort to each maid;

Bringing days of formal visit, social feast and rustic sport;
Of bull-baiting on the plaza, of love-making in the court.

Vainly then at Concha's lattice, vainly as the idle wind,
Rose the thin high Spanish tenor that bespoke the youth too kind;

Vainly, leaning from their saddles, caballeros, bold and fleet,
Plucked for her the buried chicken from beneath their mustang's
feet;

So in vain the barren hillsides with their gay serapes blazed,
Blazed and vanished in the dust-cloud that their flying hoofs had
raised.

Then the drum called from the rampart, and once more, with
patient mien,
The Commander and his daughter each took up the dull routine, -

Each took up the petty duties of a life apart and lone,
Till the slow years wrought a music in its dreary monotone.

V

Forty years on wall and bastion swept the hollow idle breeze,
Since the Russian eagle fluttered from the California seas;

Forty years on wall and bastion wrought its slow but sure decay,
And St. George's cross was lifted in the port of Monterey;

And the citadel was lighted, and the hall was gayly drest,
All to honor Sir George Simpson, famous traveler and guest.

Far and near the people gathered to the costly banquet set,
And exchanged congratulations with the English baronet;

Till, the formal speeches ended, and amidst the laugh and wine,
Some one spoke of Concha's lover,—heedless of the warning sign.

Quickly then cried Sir George Simpson, "Speak no ill of him, I
pray, —
He is dead. He died, poor fellow, forty years ago this day.

"Died while speeding home to Russia, falling from a fractious horse.
Left a sweetheart, too, they tell me. Married, I suppose, of course!

"Lives she yet?" A deathlike silence fell on banquet, guests, and
hall,
And a trembling figure rising fixed the awestruck gaze of all.

Two black eyes in darkened orbits gleamed beneath the nun's
white hood;
Black serge hid the wasted figure, bowed and stricken where it
stood.

"Lives she yet?" Sir George repeated. All were hushed as Concha
drew
Closer yet her nun's attire. "Señor, pardon, she died too!"

THE RUSSELL CALIFORNIA REPRINTS

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IN PRESS — WILL BE READY IN AUTUMN OF 1926

THE REZANOV VOYAGE TO NUEVA CALIFORNIA

¶ This is the report of Nicolai Petrovich Rezanov to the Russian minister of commerce at Saint Petersburg. Therein he details the chief incidents of that historic Russian voyage in 1806, — “the first footstep of a Russian on the soil of Nueva California.” The MS. translation in the Academy of Pacific Coast History at Berkeley is poor work. Its omissions are now supplied and many inaccuracies corrected. The edition is limited — some two hundred and sixty copies. Intending subscribers will kindly notify this Press of that fact, and notice will be sent when the book is ready and subscription-books are open. REZANOV IS HIS OWN INTERPRETER — HE MAKES PLAIN HIS ACTS & INTENTIONS

THE PRIVATE PRESS OF THOMAS C. RUSSELL

1734 NINETEENTH AVENUE, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

The Rezanov Voyage to Nueva California in 1806

Some Specimen Pages

THE SECOND DIVISION
AT THE PUERTO DE SAN FRANCISCO

ENTER the Puerto de San Francisco – Challenged – Surrender of ship demanded – Politic explanations – Don Luis Antonio Argüello, comandante temporal of Presidio – Invitation to dinner – Padre José Antonio Uría – Overwhelmed by cordial reception – Tactfulness of Don Luis – Where were the Nadeschda and the Neva? – Further politic explanations – Misión San Francisco de Asís – Misionero padres in favor of trade – Boston vessels spread reports of Russian distress in north – Rezanov's generosity and display of wealth – Abundance at Nueva California and its climate invite crew to desert – The hospitable Argüellos – The beautiful Doña Concepción – Past sufferings delightfully requited – Arrival of Don José Joaquín Arrillaga, gobernador of Nueva California – He is saluted by two forts – Artillery increased since Vancouver's visit in 1792 – Questions of etiquette – Padre Pedro De la Cueva – Rezanov's reception by the gobernador at Presidio – Don José Darío Argüello, comandante of the Presidio de San Francisco – Don José De la Guerra y Noriega, comandante of the Presidio de Monterey – Both come from Monterey – Gobernador grants a business interview – Rezanov's plea for commercial intercourse – Disclaimer of Russia's desire to colonize in Spanish territory – Wealth in north sufficient – Object of visit to procure breadstuffs and agree upon trade preliminaries – Gobernador defers decision – Rezanov's private source of information – Gobernador fearful of compromising himself – Possible breach of concord between their governments – Rezanov's speedy departure requested – He protests – Asks permission to purchase breadstuffs while nothing prevents – Also to permit barter for goods on ship – Arguments used to accomplish his purpose – No grain delivered – Incidents rendering his position critical – Decides to become serious with the beautiful Concha Argüello – Her disposition and character – Her merry description of Nueva California – The proposal and acceptance – Her parents shocked – Perplexity of the misioneros

— Her brave front overcomes all opposition — Final decision left to throne of Rome — The betrothal — What it brought about — The Russian now master — Hispaniolized, in estimation of Spaniards — Grain now delivered and merchandise disposed of — Ambitious plans of Rezanov — His regrets for Russia's lost opportunities to occupy the whole coast — Spanish court's fear of Russia — Trade neglected by Spaniards in past — Chinese goods reach California via Mexico — Manila a free port — Enormous profits — Spaniards open ports on Eastern coast of America to United States — Plans to further trade between Nueva California and Russia — Spanish king's expenditures for maintenance of garrisons and warships — Funds for the padres with which to erect churches — Smuggling by vessels from the United States — Leave desperate ruffians and women — "Disturb our peace and corrupt our morals" — Attempt to remain permanently — The Bostonian Captain O'Cain and his doings — Successful plan of the gobernadorto drive off intruders — Vessels and officers trading or smuggling on coast — News from Europe — Napoleonic wars — System of official communication between Europe, Mexico, and Nueva California — Precautions in case vessel carrying dispatches is taken by enemy — Letters and documents in duplicate or triplicate — Rezanov outlines manner in which his romance originated — Sets out his plans for serving his country and furthering its interests in America in case of its completion — Could not be done by any one else — He sacrifices himself for the good of others.

THE THIRD DIVISION

PUERTO DE SAN FRANCISCO TO SITKA

DEPARTURE from Puerto de San Francisco – Gobernador and friends go to Fuerte de San Joaquín to take leave of the Russians on the Juno – Russians salute with seven shots, and Spaniards with nine – Island of Kaigan – Be calmed – Heavy gale – Arrival at Norfolk Sound – Salute fort – No reply – Prepare for hostilities – Reassured on arrival of bidarkas – Anchor in harbor of New Archangel – Fever and an eruption broke out on voyage – All recover – Occurrences in Russian American possessions during absence – Scurvy at New Archangel and Kadiak – Many deaths – Herring appear, and relieve situation – Armed Kolosh come to fish – Precautionary measures doubled – Arrival of ship O’Cain – Captain Winship refuses to trade with Kolosh upon seeing critical situation – They leave all the sooner – Their fear of Baranov – Rezanov regrets that Baranov will leave country – Kolosh watch fort closely – Rumors of attempt to capture port – Defenses sufficient – All men armed while at work – Yakutat captured by savages – Fort fired and people killed – Perpetrators bribed by Akoi Kolosh – Advices from other places of threats to exterminate Russians – Hardships suffered in transporting furs and provisions at Kadiak – Many drowned – Territory requires seaworthy boats instead of bidarkas – Captain Winship reports coming of Americans to settle on the Columbia River – Easier for Russians to settle there – Claims of the United States to this shore challenged – Prediction that they will discontinue making settlements there – Excluded from western coasts by commercial agreement – Names of Boston vessels cruising and trading in the sounds and on coast – Their intrusion resented – Not necessary to enter into negotiations concerning coast with United States – Bostonians will quit if country strengthened – Kamehameha, king of Sandwich Islands – His enterprise – Desires to enter into trade relations – Yermak and Rotislav, ships built by Baranov – Much success in horticulture – Rezanov’s plea in closing his report.

T H E F I R S T D I V I S I O N
SITKA TO PUERTO DE SAN FRANCISCO

CALAMITOUS situation of the Russian American possessions in Alaska – Privations and starvation – Purchase from the Americans of the ship Juno and her cargo – Bare subsistence on the meager supply of provisions on board – Resolve of Rezanov to save the Russian American possessions or perish – Voyage to Nueva California determined upon – Leave Sitka on the Juno – Scurvy-stricken crew – Former intention to explore the Columbia River – Its mouth sighted – Contrary winds drive ship south – Return on following day – Carried farther north by strong current – Gray's Harbor – North shore resembles mouth of Columbia – Doctor Langsdorff enters harbor in bidarka – Country seemed to be inhabited – Another attempt to enter Columbia – Anchor under difficulties – Rescued from critical situation – Sickness of crew compels departure for south – Favorable wind – Arrival at entrance to Puerto de San Francisco on night of March 27, 1806 – Anchor outside on account of dense fog, and wait till morning.

THE THIRD DIVISION PUERTO DE SAN FRANCISCO TO SITKA

I MUST ALSO REPORT to your excellency our return voyage from California, and the circumstances connected therewith.

We left the Puerto de San Francisco on the 10th of May, 1806 [o. s.], at six o'clock in the afternoon. The gobernador and all our friends went to the fort to take leave of us. We saluted with seven shots, and they answered with nine. After leaving, we gained only in longitude at first, and after running over ten degrees in that direction, we found a favorable wind, which carried us to the island of Kaigan. Here we were becalmed ten days. At this time many of our shrouds gave way, and we had hardly succeeded in mending them with yarn made from cable and rope ends, when a very heavy gale arose, in which all our masts would have snapped off had not our repairs been made.

We arrived off Norfolk Sound on the 8th of June, and saluted the fort by firing. As they did not reply, and as we neither met bidarkas nor saw any human beings anywhere, we became doubtful, especially as

These, gracious sire, are all the observations that my six weeks' sojourn in Nueva California allowed me to make in that country. You will pardon me if I have at times expressed my own personal feelings, and ascribe such expressions to a weakness common to mankind.

* * * Should fate decree the completion of my romance, — not begun in hot passion, which is not becoming at my age, but arising under the pressure of conditions, — remoteness, duties, responsibilities, — perhaps also under the influence of remnants of feelings that in the past were a source of happiness in my life, — then, and in such case, I shall be in a position to serve my country once again, as by a personal examination of the harbor of Vera Cruz, Mexico, and by a trip through the interior parts of America. This could not be accomplished by, nor would permission be granted to, any one else, the suspicious Spanish temperament forbidding such investigations. I should also be able to inform you fully, gracious sire, as to their trade, their surplus, and their needs. Upon becoming acquainted with the viceroy of Nueva España, I could be of benefit

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